DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 882 EA 026 669

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TITLE Shared Decision Making with Collective Bargaining.
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Collective Bargaining; Decision Making; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Styles; Organizational Change; *Participative Decision Making; School Administration; Teacher Administrator Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the changing role of school leaders, in light of the current trend toward participative decision making. Executive Order 12871 mandates the formation of a partnership between unions and management, which will result in teachers playing an active role in decision making. Leaders, particularly leaders of Department of Defense schools, should be concerned with the erosion of their managerial prerogatives as delineated by contractual agreements. The paper discusses why administrators need to understand shared decision making and describes strategies for engaging teachers in the decision-making process without completely giving up authority. Options for moving toward interest-based bargaining include holding roundtable discussions; including teachers in decisions about noncontractual issues; and engaging in collaborative, rather than collective, bargaining. It is argued that school leaders will not lose ground if the decisions are related to improved conditions for students. Administrators ultimately must balance the need to manage with the need to share ownership. (LMI)

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Running head: SHARED DECISION MAKING WITH COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Approaching Shared Decision Making With Collective Bargaining

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Abstract

Now is the time for leaders in Department of Defense Schools to share decision making responsibilities. As Executive Order 12871 mandates the formation of a partnership between union's and management there will be increased need for teachers to play an active role in the decision making process. Leaders must concern themselves with erosion of their managerial prerogatives as delineated by contractual agreements. First, this paper will identify the reasons why administrators should be concerned with shared decision making. Second, strategies for engaging teachers in the decision making process without completely "giving up the ship" will be introduced. A summary will describe the implications of the strategies and will identify the advantages and disadvantages for each strategy.

Approaching Shared Decision Making With Collective Bargaining

Now is the time for leaders to share decision making responsibilities. As the Overseas Educator's Association (OEA) increases pressure for playing an active role in the decision making process, leaders concern themselves with erosion of their managerial prerogatives. First, this paper will identify the reasons that administrators are concerned with shared decision making. Second, strategies for engaging teachers in the decision making process without completely "giving up the ship" will be introduced. A summary will describe the implications of the strategies and will identify the advantages and disadvantages for each strategy.

Many school leaders face difficulties with decision making when incorporating site based management or collective bargaining models. Disagreements with teachers often arise with issues such as budgets for supplies and equipment, scheduling, staff development, and curriculum design. Often times disputes are almost a given for discussions related to compensation and working conditions. As a tendency of self preservation, a school leader may prefer to avoid discussion or robust debate with the faculty. One of the most troublesome facets to arriving at a good decision is to do so without alienating teachers and their union. With the historical perspective of collective bargaining, many contractual obligations and agreements have eroded the school leader's ability to make decisions for their school. Additionally, many principals and superintendents have found themselves locked into decision making models that are the result of agreements reached by past

practice, statutes, and the contract itself. Unfortunately, the end result of negotiations is often a mediocre decision while the negotiators have learned to distrust the each other's intentions (Cherim, 1982; Holland, 1994; Keough, 1987).

Many factors further aggravate relationships in the decision making models. Not all participants in the collective bargaining process enter negotiations fully committed to making the process work while others enter the process with the objective of gaining power (Eiler, 1991). Recent trends in collective bargaining call for reducing adversarial dialog to embrace a more collegial exchange of information that is more conducive to professional educator behavior (Cherim, 1982). For leaders of the Department of Defense (DOD) and Domestic Department of Defense Educational System (DODDESS) the time to act is now. Executive order 12871 calls for the development of partnerships between the Overseas Educators Association (OEA) and management.

For such partnerships to exist, there must be effective strategies and communications in place at the school level. Some leaders may invite discussion as a way of finding good solutions to present problems (Robbins, 1994). This, however, tends to be the exception rather than the norm.

Perhaps the most significant danger in an alienated relationship between school leaders and the faculty is the threat that it poses to good curriculum development. Curriculum development is a "nested process" that relies on state frameworks, major national curriculum projects, the recommendations of experts, and the recommendations of classroom teachers (Glatthorn, 1993). As a tenet of Total Quality Education, one must safeguard

against threats to contributing roles of classroom teachers in the curriculum design process. Therefore, it is paramount to maintain patterns of communication that involve active listening and the exchange of an assortment of ideas.

How can the principal develop strategies to make good decisions without giving up control of management rights? The following options may provide strategies for moving towards interest based bargaining.

Models of decision making

Round table discussions

Where decision making is a management right as provided by contract, leaders face the burden of making a decision that will effect the entire school community. When shortcomings of the decision are realized, the result may be a lengthy grievance. In this situation, two liabilities must be recognized. First, a poor decision impacts negatively on the school. Second, credibility of your leadership may suffer if poor decisions are a normal part of your repertoire.

Often times, a union will insist that all conversations between principals and teachers may affect working conditions. In this scenario, it is best to restrict important conversations to central forums or round table discussions.

A good example of this is administering a school budget. Most contracts identify budgeting of funds as a management right and responsibility. To effectively meet the needs of all needs in a school, a principal may need to gather information from the faculty (many contracts have provisions for consultation meetings). This information can be solicited from the faculty by

meeting with a member from each department or grade level. Focusing on curriculum needs and then translating those needs into fiscal needs will generate the necessary information.

I have seen this process implemented at a High School where there was a per pupil allocation for instructional supplies. Within the school setting, it was very important to budget for every portion of the curriculum. If anyone was left out, that portion of the curriculum could be harmed. Furthermore, needs in each area were not static. Replicating budget allocations from previous years may be efficient but not effective. Therefore, there was a recognized need to rebuild the budget every year.

During this process, it should be noted that the principal does not give up his management right to implement a budget. Likewise, teachers serve in an advisory capacity and do not represent their colleagues. This distinction is important and should be made very clear to the participants in the early stages of the process. Much frustration may arise if people do not fully understand what their role is in the process. The decision is not truly a shared decision, however, information is presented to shape the leader's decisions. The benefit of this approach is that the concerns and interests of the teachers have been transmitted through a process that will more effectively meet their needs (Scroggs, 1989).

Non Contractual topics

Virtually every union - management relationship identifies topics that are not covered by the contract. Often times the people most affected by a decision are the teachers. In some regions, like Michigan (Geisert, 1984), curriculum decisions

belong to teachers and their unions. In most areas, however, administrators find more latitude in implementing curriculum decisions. This is an area where teacher input is most needed. Under circumstances where an issue is not governed by the contract, leaders may show initiative in talking to teachers about what kind of curriculum to implement. Forming committee meetings, councils, and special interest groups and discussing curriculum design is a renewing process for principals and teachers alike.

A local elementary school has decided to pool all of their financial resources and to make a significant commitment to implementing computer technology school wide. This idea emerged from discussions of special interests group and the principal. Interestingly, it was the special interest group that did much of the research and persuaded the remainder of the faculty to make the commitment.

Focusing on areas such as the curricular growth of a school shifts attention from business routines to the central mission of education. Discussions on topics such as course offerings, scheduling, textbook adoptions, and instructional design may be more meaningful uses of faculty time.

Using the Total Quality Education approach, one quickly recognizes the need to assemble a broad array of resources to formulate alternatives and make decisions regarding curriculum (Glatthorn, 1993). These resources result in higher quality professional participation than the environment void of curricular discussion.

Commitment to partnership

The Ashland School District in Ashland Oregon determined that

traditional collective bargaining was not effectively meeting their needs any longer. With this understanding in mind, they committed to designing and implementing a new procedure where teamwork became the norm for decision making. Teachers and administrators engaged in a process of jointly identifying and solving problems rather than exchanging proposals and counter proposals at the negotiating table (Daggett, 1991).

The model developed by the Ashland School District is known as Collaborative Bargaining. Parallels are seen in efforts such as Interest based bargaining and Labor Management Cooperation. While this process is a drastic departure from traditional collective bargaining, it is often the result of complete frustration with the process. Often times, this means that results from collective bargaining have to become mutually disadvantageous to both parties at the bargaining table.

Since President Clinton Signed Executive Order 12871 on October 1, 1993, little has become of a partnership oriented agreement in many Department of Defense schools.

Summary

Perhaps, the greatest concern of many principals is losing control and authority in the decision making process. Understandably, school leaders are reluctant to make significant changes in the way that they make decisions in their schools. The change does not have to mean losing ground if one can relate improved conditions for students and teachers to the decisions made.

Concerns about maintaining teacher morale and commitment to instruction are equally viable concerns (Rosenholtz, 1989). Under

these circumstances, the school leader must carefully balance the need to manage against the need to share ownership for such decisions. It is important for teachers to be actively engaged in discussions about their work especially when the impact is likely to be great.

It behooves leaders to actively listen and participate in such discussions. Finding room to agree and to work in a collegial relationship will yield positive results in the long run. Such results will be manifested in the form of enhanced decisions, maintaining a commitment to instruction, and lastly to provide conciliatory form of communication between teachers and administrators. If one perceives conflict and turmoil as an opportunity to improve, then that will likely be the result.

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